



U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations

PRESS RELEASE

Statement of Senator Daniel K. Inouye (D-Hawaii) On the Omnibus Withdrawal December 17, 2010 (as prepared for delivery)

Mr. President, last night the Senate made a regrettable decision to defer action on completing its work on the fiscal year 2011 appropriations bills. I shouldn't have to remind anyone that we are in mid-December, one week before Christmas, nearly three months into the fiscal year. Yet, because our Republican colleagues have decided that they cannot support a bill that they helped craft, we now face placing the Federal Government on autopilot for another two months under a continuing resolution – a C.R.

My colleagues should all understand the consequences of this decision. First, a CR does virtually nothing to accommodate the priorities of the Congress and it abdicates responsibility for providing much needed oversight of the requests of the Executive Branch. Each year, the House and Senate Appropriations Committees conduct hundreds of hearings to review the budgets of our government agencies. Our Committee Members and staffs conduct thousands of meetings with officials from the Executive Branch, our states and municipalities, leaders and workers from American companies, and the general public.

The Committee relies heavily on the work of the Government Accountability Office, the Congressional Budget Office and outside experts to determine spending needs. Tens of thousands of questions are forwarded each year to officials in the Executive Branch asking them to justify the funding requested for each respective agency. It is painstaking, detailed work. It requires great knowledge of each of our federal agencies, a desire to dig into the nitty gritty details of agency budgets and question the programs and functions they manage. This annual review is conducted in a bi-partisan fashion with Democratic and Republican members and staff working in close cooperation to determine how our taxpayer funds should best be allocated.

These meetings, reviews, questions, and deliberations together lead to the formulation of 12 individual Appropriations bills. Each bill is drafted by the subcommittee Chairman and ranking member in concert, marked up by its subcommittee, and then reviewed, debated, and amended by the Full Committee.

Mr. President, a year's worth of work came down to a choice. Would the Senate acquiesce in providing a bare bones approach to governing or would it insist upon allocating funding by agency and by program with thousands of adjustments that are the result of the good work of the House and Senate Appropriations Committees. To me the answer was obvious. Nothing good comes from a CR. The Congress owes it to the American people to demand that programs funded by their hard-earned money will be for the best purposes we can recommend based on the countless hours of work of our Committees and their staff.

Some will point out that a continuing resolution will result in fewer dollars being spent. That is technically correct. A CR will include less spending than was included in the Omnibus, but like the old saying goes – you get what you pay for.

The savings in the continuing resolution come primarily by shortchanging national defense and security. Under the CR, the total allocated to the Defense subcommittee for discretionary spending is \$508 billion. Under the Omnibus bill the total is \$520.6 billion. So, more than half of the so called savings is really additional cuts to the Defense Department. For Homeland Security the CR would cut nearly \$800 million from the omnibus measure.

In fact, if we look at the funding for all security programs in the bill, more than \$15 billion in cuts come from this sector. Surely we could have all agreed that we shouldn't be determining our national defense and security funding on the fact that Congress was unable to finish its work. Who among us really believes we should base our recommendations for defense, homeland security and veterans on whatever level was needed last year? Mr. President, this is no way to run a government. The United States of America is not a second-rate nation. We should not govern like she is.

The continuing resolution by design mandates that programs are to be held at the amounts provided last year regardless of merit or need. Moreover, in the vacuum that this creates it is left to the bureaucrats to determine how taxpayer funds are allocated, not elected representatives.

The alternative that I offered was a product of bi-partisan cooperation in the Senate in negotiations with the majority in the House. It represented a good faith effort to fund many of the priorities of the Administration while ensuring that it is the Congress who determines how the people's money will be spent.

Mr. President, while the Omnibus bill that we drafted provided more funding than the CR, it is by no means the amount sought by the Administration. Earlier this year more than half of the body voted to limit discretionary spending to the so-called Sessions McCaskill level which in total is \$29 billion below the cost of the budget requested by the Obama Administration. The Appropriations Committee responded to the will of the majority and adopted this ceiling on spending. Moreover, Mr. President, we didn't use any gimmicks or tricks to hit this target. Instead, each of our subcommittees was directed to take another look at the funds they were recommending and provide additional cuts. Each was tasked to identify unneeded prior year funds and to use those to achieve this reduced level. It was not easy. Many worthwhile programs were cut, but we reduced the bills reported from Committee by \$15 billion, enough to reach the Sessions McCaskill level while still fully paying for Pell grants and covering all CBO scoring changes.

The Administration's top priorities have received funding, but not always at the level sought. Congressional priorities were cut back. Essential needs were met, but any frills were deleted.

For many members, this debate focused on earmarks. Here too the Congress tightened its belt. As defined by Senate Rules, we reduced our spending below what was provided in FY 2010 by nearly 35%. Less than \$8 billion was recommended in the omnibus bill for congressionally-directed spending programs compared to more than \$12 billion in 2010. My colleagues should be advised that since 2006, the Congress has reduced spending on earmarks by nearly 75%. In total, the omnibus bill recommended less than three quarters of one percent of discretionary funding on earmarks. A tiny fraction of funds are provided so all of you can support the needs of your constituents which are not funded by the Administration.

We have all heard those who say this election was about earmarks. Nothing could be further from the truth. Let me repeat that, this election was not about earmarks. My colleagues who went home and reminded the voters what they had done for them – yes with earmarks – are returning to the Senate. That's right. If this election was about public distaste for earmarks why did I receive a higher percentage of votes than any other member of this body who had an opponent? Why is it that virtually all of my colleagues who took credit for earmarks will be coming back next year?

Mr. President, this election was about gridlock and partisan gamesmanship. And what we saw in the past 24 hours was more of the same. Endless delaying tactics followed by decision making by partisan point scoring rather than what is good for our nation.

Mr. President, some of our colleagues have suggested that since this bill is 2,000 pages long it is obviously too big. But, this is not one bill, it is 12 bills, funding all federal agencies. Of course it is 2,000 pages long. It is simply not rational to object to a bill because of its length. That is nonsense.

Mr. President, too often our debates in the Senate focus on mind-numbing budget totals that are hard to grapple with. But, when the CR is \$15-20 billion below the Omnibus, it is not just a number, it is specific programs that will be cut or eliminated. When we point out that congressional priorities were curtailed, these are real programs that impact the lives of millions of Americans. When we are talking about a bill as large as the omnibus we are talking about thousands of such programs.

For example, in the Defense subcommittee we prioritized the purchase of more helicopters to move about the rough terrain in Afghanistan. These funds were not requested in the Pentagon's budget but were identified as a need by the field commanders. More than \$900 million in new helicopter purchases will be lost from the bill when we vote for a CR instead of the omnibus.

We added \$228 million to test and procure the new double v-hull improvements to Stryker armored vehicles which will dramatically improve soldiers' protection. These weren't included in the President's request.

To support our wounded warriors we added \$100 million for life saving medical research in psychological health and traumatic brain injury.

Under a CR, funding for the Cooperative Threat Reduction program which secures nuclear weapons and materials in Russia would be reduced by \$100 million.

There are hundreds of additional examples which could be described in defense alone from breast cancer research to additional F-18 jets for the Navy. But it is not just defense that will be impacted. Similar issues will be found in every agency.

It is evident that the threat to the security of the United States evolves every day. As evidenced by the growth of homegrown terrorism, such as the Times Square bomber, the New York subway plot, and the Fort Hood shooting, and recent efforts to blow up aircraft over the United States, whether the Christmas Day bombing attempt or the recent attempt to blow up all-cargo planes, it is critical that careful decisions be made on the allocation of resources to the Department of Homeland Security.

But, a continuing resolution would not provide the Transportation Security Administration with the resources necessary to enhance our defenses against terrorist attacks, such as Northwest Flight 253 and the recent attempts against all-cargo aircraft. The Omnibus bill provides \$375 million above the continuing resolution for TSA to acquire 800 explosives trace detection units, 275 additional canine teams, hire 31 additional intelligence officers, and strengthen international aviation security.

The Omnibus bill provides \$52 million above the continuing resolution to deploy radiation portal monitors where vulnerabilities exist, such as airports and ports, and for radiation detection pagers and backpacks used to detect and identify nuclear materials.

Because we have chosen not to enact an Omnibus we will miss an opportunity to address cyber security at the Department of Transportation. DOT recently assessed the security of its computer systems, and found it sorely lacking. Security gaps at DOT are putting at risk computer systems that manage our air traffic and monitor our national infrastructure. The Department requested \$30 million for fiscal year 2011 to fix this problem as soon as possible. An omnibus appropriations act would provide this funding, but a year-long CR will do nothing to address this urgent problem.

Not passing the Omnibus would halt new national security enhancements intended to improve the FBI's cyber security, WMD and counterterrorism capabilities, and assist in litigation of intelligence and terrorism cases. The FBI could not hire 126 new agents and 32 intelligence analysts to strengthen national security and counter terrorist threats.

The Omnibus was better for our brave men and women who work, as members of law enforcement, to make our streets and the everyday lives of our constituents safer. Without an Omnibus, the Department of Justice will not be able to hire 143 new FBI agents and 157 new prosecutors for U.S. Attorneys to target mortgage and financial fraud scammers and schemers who prey on America's hard working, middle class families and devastated our communities and economy.

Mr. President, when it comes to the health and well-being of our constituents, it is clear that passing an Omnibus is just better policy. Again we are talking about the redirecting of resources to address today's needs, not last year's needs. Specifically:

The Omnibus bill included \$142 million in vital program increases for the Indian Health Service that are not in a full-year CR including: \$44 million for the Indian Health Care Improvement Fund, which provides additional assistance to the neediest tribes; an additional \$46 million for Contract Health Services; an additional \$40 million for Contract Support Costs; as well as support for new initiatives in drug prevention, chronic diseases prevention and assistance for urban Indian clinics. Indian health programs have been underfunded for decades. The Omnibus bill would continue the strides that have been made over in the recent past to significantly increase funding for the IHS and thereby provide more and better medical care for Native Americans and Alaska Natives. A CR brings this progress to a halt.

Mr. President, there are hundreds more examples of what will not be done because the Congress will not pass this Omnibus bill. Moreover, because a CR turns over the decision making to the Executive Branch, we can't even tell this body all the things that the bureaucrats won't do that are important to the members of the Congress and our constituents.

The bill that I would have brought to the Senate represented a clear and far superior alternative. It better protected our national security. It ensured that the Congress determines how our citizens' funds will be allocated as stipulated in the Constitution. It was written in coordination with the Senate Republican members of the Committee. It was not a perfect document. It represented a lot of compromise between the House and Senate. It made \$29 billion in reductions from the President's program. But, it was a good bill which ensured that the programs important to the American people will be funded. It assumed responsibility for spending decisions that are rightfully the duty of the Congress.

Mr. President, we find ourselves where we are today because we were unable to get that message across. In many respects it was a failure of communications. We were never able to adequately explain to everyone what the good things in this bill would have accomplished. And so, instead we are now faced with placing the government on autopilot. Our Republican colleagues will allow the Administration to determine how to spend its funds for another two months rather than letting the Congress decide. And, in two months we will find ourselves having to pass another 2,000 page bill that will cost more than \$1 trillion or once again abdicate our authority to the Obama Administration to determine how our taxpayer funds should be spent.

Mr. President, I wish there were a better way, but the decisions by our colleagues on the other side who helped craft this bill have left us with no choice.